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ABSTRACT

The system whereby teacher education faculty demonstrate their professional rectitude in most colleges and universities is a record of achievement more properly called a dossier (a collection of material and evidence) rather than a portfolio (the developmental record of a career). The scholarship of teaching (one of four overlapping functions of scholarship identified by Ernest Boyer) can be captured, together with the other functions of scholarship (scholarship of discovery, of integration, and of application), in a portfolio model that frames the necessary connections between theory and praxis. The creative character of teacher learning can be captured by portfolio assessment when the portfolio is a collection of the faculty member's best work and demonstration of professional vitality and vibrancy. Research has shown that faculty members who report benefits from putting course portfolios together are those who reflect on what their objectives were, what they did to accomplish them, and how that was reflected. The portfolio assessment process relies on the Deweyan notion that transformative experience can be done by common people sharing thoughts and insights in a cooperative and critical manner. The portfolio can, with proper understanding, be the way to reveal the hidden treasure of meaning. (Contains 11 references.) (JDD)

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PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT - A NEW FACE

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In a recent article, Eliezer Shore, the publisher of Bas Avin, a journal of Hasidic thought, talked about the morning prayer service in his synagogue and noted that there were old men who had been reciting the words of the service, the psalms, for over seventy years. And, he wondered if they still meant the words as they recited them. He, who had been saying them for a much shorter time, struggled with their repetitiveness. The erosive character of repetition, he maintained, is true of meditation, the same is true of ritual, the same is true of study. Ritual and repetition are at the heart of every religious tradition and even the most inspired seeker, he asserted, may soon find himself aground in the shallow waters of daily observance.

When members of the faculty of a university must demonstrate their professional rectitude, the form which determines the accountability report is usually based on the three criteria: teaching effectiveness, research/scholarship, and academic citizenship. Teaching, research, and service are invoked as a kind of mantra. With the onset of portfolio assessment as a redesigned tool for measures of accountability - for whatever purpose - we may legitimately ask if the trinitarian incantation of teaching,

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research and service can be, once again, infused with meaning.

With the system that seems to prevail in most colleges and universities, the record of achievement of a faculty member is more properly called a dossier - a collection of material and evidence - rather than a portfolio - the developmental record of a career. More often than not teacher education faculty requesting tenure, promotion, and other-less freighted rewards develop cases that bear a strong resemblance to those submitted by faculty in other schools and colleges in the university structure. In fact their successful passage through the university governance structure is enhanced if conformity and similarity are characteristics of petitions of this nature.

However, an argument can be made that the "meaning" of the teacher-education-faculty-member's dossier or portfolio should derive from the nature of the discipline. In a word, teacher educators serve as primary sources of professional knowledge and have or should have the expertise to educate, to form and shape, teachers-to-be so that they can make professional decisions in a time of restructuring and change. Current norms for faculty evaluation in schools and colleges and centers for education do not place the evaluation of teaching, scholarship and service in the context of teacher formation and education. The novice-

teacher, the colleague of the future, is the "outcome" of the curricular and experiential sequence of the teacher education program. Among other competencies the newly-minted teacher will have to effectively manage a required participation in school restructuring, performance-based education, and site-based management. When they are equipped to do so, these acquired competencies should redound to the credit of the teacher-educator as well.

Ernest Boyer has made the case that we have been preoccupied for too long with the debate between the relative importance of teaching and research. He finds these arguments less than productive, and he would rather emphasize the notion that the formal object of faculty activity and behavior is scholarship. And that scholarship, he asserts, is faceted into four overlapping functions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. Presumably this formal character of a college and university faculty distinguishes it from the faculties engaged in basic education.

The scholarship of discovery is research properly so-called, the type of research that makes a contribution to the paideia of the discipline. The scholarship of integration is the development of the knowledge base into shapes and forms that are conducive to presentations. The

scholarship of application is the use of one's expertise to enrich the community perhaps to illustrate the ancient maxim, "good is diffusive of itself." And lastly there is the intriguing notion of the scholarship of teaching. I submit that the scholarship of teaching can be captured, together with the other "scholarships" in a portfolio model that will frame the necessary connections between theory and praxis in school and in college classrooms. In addition this frame will also distinguish the teacher-educator from colleagues in the other academic units in the university.

To my mind, whoever coined the phrase "portfolio assessment" used very apt terminology. It is a sound metaphor. Those who use portfolios to demonstrate their best work are architects, designers, artists, photographers and models, gifted individuals who wish to use this ordered collection as an instrument to persuade others to employ them, to use their services and skills. A portfolio for a faculty member - or an administrator for that matter - is a collection of the best work designed as a demonstration of a professional vitality and vibrancy. Over against this concept of a portfolio assessment is the rather shopworn, tripartite formulation of teaching, research, and service where each function to be disparate, isolated one from the other, and that depends heavily on lists of publications and committees and numerical summaries of SIR forms. Perhaps this formulation has become the fulcrum for ennui and angst by being used so frequently in high-stakes situation: the

annual review, the third year review, the tenure review, the promotion reviews, the review for the teaching award, the scholarship award and whatever the university determine needs to be reviewed. The end of the review process is an imposition of a meaning, the creation of a committee recommendation, from this primordial stuff.

By way of comparison and contrast, the adoption of a portfolio assessment system seems to offer great promise. It has yet to be realized and can embrace many figurations. But there is resistance to change as Jack Robinson of Old Dominion University reported in a presentation at the AERA meeting in mid-April of 1993. In his presentation he presented an examination of faculty members' reactions to constructing and evaluating course portfolios and an exploration of the manner in which the process might be improved. Although these were course portfolios in the sociology, accounting, and dental hygiene departments and not teaching portfolios in the Seldin-sense, the authors of the courses took the process seriously and personally. He asked the question: "What happened when portfolios were constructed and reviewed?" Here is his answer:

> Basically, it did not work. For the majority of faculty members, across all three departments, when I asked faculty if they got anything out of constructing course portfolios for the evaluation process they said "no". When I asked whether the portfolios had captured their ideas about teaching they said "it didn't". When I asked what questions or ideas it had generated - "it hadn't". When I asked if they could

> judge differences in quality, most said they "couldn't". They viewed most differences that they had observed as a matter of "style".

He did also say, and this is important, that only a few faculty members reported any benefit from putting course portfolios together. And these, he said, "...tended to be faculty members who had written some reflective thoughts about what their objectives were, what they did to accomplish those, and how that was reflected in their course portfolios."

Even Lee Shulman had some harsh things to say about portfolios. They are, he asserted, "...messy to construct, cumbersome to store, difficult to score, and vulnerable to misrepresentation". Given these problems, one would wonder why Dr. Shulman so favors this methodology. The reason, he goes on to say, is that "...in ways that no other assessment method can, portfolios provide a connection to the contexts and personal histories that characterize real teaching and make it possible to document the unfolding of both teaching and learning over time."

Let me count the ways.

Earlier I used the word frame. Now I would like to modify that word with the adjective hermeneutic - the hermeneutic frame. It is based on Heidegger's Dasein of

course - "being which is there." The portfolio can help us capture the epistemology of knowing. As "beings-in-the-world" we do not and cannot escape our cultural situation. We are in the hermeneutic circle of having our culture and language define us just as we define our culture and its language. In our classes, in our programs, in our collegium, we create knowledge - interactively, dialogically, conversationally - always within our culture and its language. The creative character of teacher-learning perhaps can be captured in whole or in part by portfolio assessment.

Alfred North Whitehead spoke of "the radically untidy, ill-adjusted character" of actual experience. Other foundationalists named it differently: Schonn's messes, Prigogine's chaos, Dewey's problems, Piaget's disequilibrium, and Kuhn's anomalies. The process of teaching-learning, itself untidy, leads to the development of precision, read discipline, and generalization, read abstraction. Perhaps this creation of meaning from the raw stuff of life can, as well, be captured in the portfolio.

Portfolio assessment in the post-modern mode will eschew a purely theoretical approach to scholarship, and especially the scholarship of teaching in an educational center. The word theoros, from which is derived the words theorist and theory, referred to one who went to the Olympic

games as a spectator, not a participant. The etymology could be pushed even further by deriving the word from theos, the Greek god. While it is indeed pleasant enough to observe, to not participate, to adopt a lordly detached intellectual posture, such is not the pattern of behavior that should be mirrored in the teacher-educator's portfolio. Rather it should be one enmeshed in the complexities of daily life.

The portfolio assessment process will not be hindered by a priggish insistence to meet pre-established criteria for reliability and validity. Rather it will rely on the Deweyan notion that transformative experience can be done by common people sharing thoughts and insights in a cooperative and critical manner. "Common experience," he says, "is capable of developing within itself methods which will secure direction for itself and will create inherent standards of judgment and value." Under the conditions of the classroom, the communal activity that will be reported in the portfolio will operate to provide direction and standards.

A portfolio will re-present to those with a need to know a metaphorical component to the educational experience. Metaphors generate; they help us see what we don't see while logic, equally important, help us to see more clearly what

we already see. Logic and metaphor and their rigorous use will be depicted in the portfolio.

And lastly, the portfolio will be a narrative of the life of the professor, a being who is becoming. And so the narrative, like all great stories, will have an indeterminacy, an unsureness that will captivate and create - with the wonder - how will this all turn out.

Early on I talked about Rabbi Shore and the tediousness of the process of prayer. He said, if our words of prayer have become routine, it is because we have not been saying them long enough. One must persevere with the practice despite the difficulty until the forms reveal their inner meaning. In our context, we can rephrase his words to say that we can frame the teaching-learning enterprise so that we can generate meaning and show it forth to our colleagues, our fellow-learners, in a mode that vibrates with vitality.

Unlike Rabbi Shore we need to ground our experiences in deep waters of our professional behavior. And there is the meaning of our enterprise.

Robert Thurman, the Chair of the Religion Department at Columbia, spoke similarly. The most important epithet for Buddha is Shasta, which means teacher. Bhuddists look to their teachers for enlightment, for the way to hidden treasure. "They can't force other people to become

happier", says Thurman, "they can only try to lead them to new understandings that would make them happier, and they're compelled to do that by their connectedness to them."

Capturing, mirroring that process is the work of the portfolio. It can be, with proper understanding, the way to reveal the hidden treasure of meaning.

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